

LITERARY ANALYSIS OF ZAMYATIN’S “WE” AND OLJAS
SULEIMENOV’S “AZ I YA”: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

Jumaboeva Gulzodakhon Umarjon qizi

Namangan State Institute of Foreign Languages,

Master degree student

Gmail: gulzodaumarovna3@gmail.com

Abstract: This article examines Evgeny Zamyatin’s “We” and Oljas Suleimenov’s “Az i Ya” through a comparative literary perspective. Both works emerge from different time periods and genres, yet they share a common function: resistance against ideological suppression. The study analyzes how symbolism, characterization and setting reveal deeper themes of individuality versus collectivism, and cultural memory versus political censorship. Findings demonstrate that Zamyatin critiques totalitarian control through dystopian fiction, while Suleimenov reclaims Turkic cultural identity through literary philology. Both authors ultimately argue that true human development depends on freedom — whether personal or cultural.

Key Words: dystopia; utopia; identity; collectivism; censorship; cultural memory; symbolism; comparative literature.

INTRODUCTION

Throughout world literature, the concept of an ideal society has been a recurring subject of philosophical and artistic reflection. This idea is rooted in the dual notions of utopia and dystopia, which represent contrasting visions of human social development. A utopia depicts a harmonious world where justice, equality and happiness reign, reflecting humanity’s perpetual hope for improvement. In contrast, a dystopia illustrates the darker outcome of ideological extremism, portraying societies where order and stability are

achieved at the expense of freedom, individuality and emotional richness. These two literary traditions provide powerful frameworks for analyzing the relationship between authority and human identity

Evgeny Zamyatin's "We" (1921) is widely regarded as the first modern dystopian novel and a foundational work that shaped later masterpieces such as Orwell's 1984 and Huxley's Brave New World. Set in a futuristic totalitarian state governed by pure logic and mathematical precision, the novel explores the consequences of sacrificing personal freedom to collective perfection. While We exposes the suppression of individual identity, Oljas Suleimenov's "Az i Ya" addresses the suppression of cultural identity. Unlike Zamyatin, Suleimenov does not employ fictional dystopia; instead, he turns to philological and historical analysis to challenge state-approved interpretations of The Tale of Igor's Campaign.

Yevgeny Zamyatin's dystopian novel "W"e is a groundbreaking work of speculative fiction that employs innovative narrative techniques to construct a chilling portrayal of a totalitarian society. Published in 1924, the novel explores themes of individualism, freedom, and the dehumanizing effects of an all encompassing state. Zamyatin's narrative choices contribute to the distinct and impactful nature of the novel, making it a precursor to the dystopian genre and a masterful example of literary experimentation (Dr. K. Shanmuga Sundara Raja, 2021).

Although the genres and historical contexts of "We" and "Az i Ya" differ significantly, both works confront powerful systems that attempt to homogenize human experience. Zamyatin exposes the dangers of collectivism enforced through total control, while Suleimenov critiques ideological monopoly enforced through historical interpretation. Together, they reveal a shared underlying message: freedom — whether personal or cultural — is the foundation of human existence. Therefore, a comparative study of these texts

is especially valuable, as it highlights how literature functions as both artistic expression and a tool for resisting oppression.

METHODOLOGY

The present study is based on a qualitative comparative literary approach aimed at analyzing and interpreting the ideological, philosophical, cultural, and stylistic dimensions of Yevgeny Zamyatin's "We" and Oljas Suleimenov's "Az i Ya". These two works belong to different genres, cultural traditions, and historical contexts, yet they are united by their critical engagement with power, identity, language, and historical consciousness. Since both texts operate on complex symbolic, ideological, and discursive levels, a qualitative interpretative methodology is the most appropriate framework for revealing their deeper meanings.

The comparative method constitutes the central methodological principle of this research. It enables the examination of "We" and "Az i Ya" as products of distinct literary systems while identifying typological parallels in their thematic orientation, ideological function, and symbolic structures.

In "We", discourse analysis makes it possible to examine the rhetoric of the One State, the linguistic erasure of individuality, the transformation of citizens into numerical signs, and the function of surveillance and confession as mechanisms of ideological control. In "Az i Ya", discourse analysis uncovers the politics of historical narration, the role of philology in shaping ideological truth, and the ways in which linguistic interpretation becomes a form of intellectual resistance against colonial epistemology. Through this method, the study demonstrates that language in We is primarily an instrument of domination, whereas in "Az i Ya" it becomes a means of reclaiming suppressed cultural and historical meanings.

Zamyatin's dystopian vision is examined through the lens of anti-utopian thinking, existential philosophy, and the critique of positivism, which reveals the novel's opposition to the absolutization of rationality and technological

progress. Suleimenov's philosophical position is interpreted through cultural epistemology and historical consciousness, emphasizing the relationship between language, identity, and collective memory. This philosophical dimension of the methodology allows the study to conceptualize both texts as forms of intellectual resistance against different manifestations of ideological oppression.

The primary corpus of the research consists of Zamyatin's "We" and Suleimenov's "Az i Ya", analyzed in their original Russian versions as well as in available scholarly translations. The selection of these texts is based on their strong oppositional stance toward dominant ideological narratives, their experimental use of language, their complex symbolic systems, and their historical significance within Soviet cultural space. Multiple editions and translations are consulted in order to ensure semantic accuracy and to minimize distortions caused by translation. These materials provide the theoretical foundation for the analysis and serve as a means of interpretative verification.

At the same time, the study acknowledges certain methodological limitations. These include the inherent subjectivity of qualitative interpretation, potential distortions caused by translation, limited access to some archival Soviet criticism, and the asymmetry between the genres of the selected works, as "We" is a dystopian novel while "Az i Ya" represents a hybrid form of historical, philological, and poetic discourse. These limitations, however, do not undermine the analytical value of the research but rather define its interpretative boundaries.

RESULTS

The comparative analysis of Yevgeny Zamyatin's "We" and Olzhas Suleimenov's "Az i Ya" reveals that although these works belong to different genres, historical contexts, and intellectual traditions, they both explore the tension between individual consciousness and dominant ideological structures. At first glance, Zamyatin's dystopian novel and Suleimenov's philological-

cultural study appear incompatible: one is a fictional narrative depicting a mechanized totalitarian future, while the other is a scholarly examination of Turkic–Slavic cultural intersections. Yet a deeper literary investigation shows that both authors are concerned with the mechanisms through which power shapes identity, historical narrative, and human autonomy. This shared thematic core forms the foundation of the comparative discussion.

In “We”, the central theme revolves around the individual’s struggle for self-awareness within a rigidly controlled society. Zamyatin constructs a world in which citizens, known only by numbers, are deprived of privacy and freedom under the surveillance of the “One State.” The protagonist, D-503, undergoes a painful journey from unquestioning obedience toward fragmented but meaningful selfhood. His encounters with I-330, the symbolic figure of rebellion, mark the turning point where personal emotion, imagination, and moral conflict challenge state-imposed rationality.

By contrast, in “Az i Ya”, Suleimenov does not depict an imagined dystopia but interrogates the historical and cultural narratives that have shaped Central Asian and Slavic identities. His exploration of the ancient epic “The Tale of Igor’s Campaign” illuminates how linguistic traces, cultural symbols, and historical interpretations have been influenced—sometimes distorted—by political biases. Suleimenov argues that literary and historical traditions are often molded by ideological priorities, which can suppress multicultural realities.

Both works employ literary devices that deepen their thematic concerns. In “We”, Zamyatin’s use of symbolic elements—such as the Green Wall, glass buildings, and mathematical metaphors—reflects the psychological struggle between order and emotion, rationality and freedom. These images build a claustrophobic and sterile environment, intensifying the protagonist’s internal fracture. “Az i Ya”, meanwhile, uses symbolism at a cultural and historical level. Suleimenov highlights linguistic markers, etymological links, and

cultural motifs to expose hidden layers of identity. While Zamyatin's symbolism is internal and psychological, Suleimenov's is external and cultural-historical; yet both authors rely on symbolic structures to challenge dominant ideologies.

In terms of genre, "We" stands as a pioneering work of dystopian fiction and early science-fiction modernism. The novel's structure reflects D-503's personal diary, blending subjective narrative with philosophical critique. Suleimenov's "Az i Ya", however, belongs to the genre of literary criticism, cultural history, and philological analysis. It is grounded in historical research, linguistic evidence, and interpretive commentary. The contrast in genre—fictional dystopia versus scholarly cultural critique—provides two different but complementary approaches to interrogating power, identity, and truth. While We exposes the psychological consequences of ideological control, "Az i Ya" confronts the historical mechanisms through which cultural narratives are legitimized or silenced.

Character representation also differs significantly but supports the comparative framework. D-503 is portrayed as a conflicted individual whose transformation reflects the human capacity for both vulnerability and rebellion. His development is internal, shaped by emotional turmoil and existential crisis. In "Az i Ya", the "characters" are not individuals but cultural voices, textual traces, and historical interpretations. Suleimenov positions himself as a mediator who reexamines suppressed or overlooked identities within the broader Eurasian cultural landscape. Thus, while Zamyatin's characterization centers on personal awakening, Suleimenov's focuses on collective memory and cultural self-definition.

When comparing the outcomes of both works, they reveal opposing but complementary trajectories. "We" concludes with the defeat of individual autonomy; the State reasserts control, demonstrating the destructive power of authoritarian ideology. "Az i Ya", however, ends with an affirmation of

intellectual independence and cultural reclamation. Suleimenov challenges established norms, advocating for a more inclusive understanding of historical heritage. The contrast between these endings—one tragic, one liberating—provides a profound lens through which to evaluate how each author confronts systems of dominance.

Overall, the comparison suggests that Zamyatin and Suleimenov, despite working in different literary spheres, ultimately address a shared central concern: the struggle to protect identity—individual in *We*, cultural-historical in *Az i Ya*—against oppressive ideological structures. Zamyatin demonstrates how personal freedom collapses under totalitarian rationalism, while Suleimenov shows how cultural identity can be reclaimed through critical inquiry and intellectual courage. Together, these works illustrate the complex relationship between power and human self-definition.

“*We*” is set in a futuristic totalitarian city characterized by transparency and surveillance:

Glass walls → loss of privacy

Integral → ideological expansion

Green Wall → boundary between nature and control

“*Az i Ya*” is set within the political environment of the 1970s Brezhnev-era USSR, defined by Russification and academic restrictions:

“*Az*” = ancient beginnings and Turkic identity;

“*Ya*” = modern individual voice and cultural self.

DISCUSSION

The findings demonstrate that although “*We*” and “*Az i Ya*” differ in form and historical context, they operate as parallel narratives of resistance. Zamyatin uses speculative fiction to illustrate the psychological consequences of totalitarian control: the state attempts to abolish emotions, imagination and individuality to sustain order. Through D-503’s transformation, the novel suggests that emotional expression is not only natural but essential to human

life. The tragedy of the protagonist — who is eventually forced to conform through the removal of imagination — highlights the fragility of personal freedom under machinery of power.

One of the most significant points of convergence between the two works lies in their treatment of power and its relationship with the individual. In *We*, power manifests itself through mathematical order, surveillance, and the transformation of human beings into numerical entities. The individual is systematically erased and replaced by a functional unit within the collective mechanism of the One State. Zamyatin's dystopia reveals how totalitarian power does not rely solely on physical violence but also operates through language, logic, and the internalization of ideological norms. The protagonist D-503 initially accepts the state's logic as absolute truth, which illustrates how domination functions most effectively when it is perceived as natural and rational. In contrast, "*Az i Ya*" exposes power through the manipulation of historical narratives and linguistic meanings. Suleimenov demonstrates that colonial domination is sustained not only through political control but also through epistemological authority, where the right to name, interpret, and define history becomes a central mechanism of oppression. In this sense, while Zamyatin focuses on political totalitarianism, Suleimenov reveals intellectual and cultural colonization as an equally powerful form of control.

However, Suleimenov's "*Az i Ya*", while not fictional, mirrors the structure of a rebellion. Instead of dramatizing oppression through futuristic imagery, Suleimenov exposes it through scientific and linguistic evidence. His reinterpretation of historical texts challenges the state-approved dominance of Slavic historiography and reveals how history can be manipulated to justify political superiority. The backlash against the book, including censorship and ideological attacks on the author, confirms that controlling the narrative of the past can be as powerful as controlling the present.

Suleimenov, through philological scholarship, exposes how cultural memory and history can be manipulated by power structures. His reinterpretation of The Tale of Igor's Campaign becomes a political act of defending suppressed cultural identity.

Together, the works demonstrate that:

- individual freedom (Zamyatin) and cultural freedom (Suleimenov) are inseparable aspects of human dignity;
- oppressive systems are sustained not only by physical violence, but also by control of language, memory and thought;
- literature functions as a site of resistance where suppressed identities — personal or cultural — can find expression.

Thus, both authors use different literary strategies to confront the same fundamental question: What remains of humanity when freedom is taken away?

Both authors therefore identify freedom as essential: for Zamyatin, personal and emotional freedom; for Suleimenov, linguistic and cultural freedom. Their works show that systems which control the mind — whether through ideology or “official” history — endanger humanity.

CONCLUSION

The comparative analysis shows that Zamyatin's “We” and Suleimenov's “Az i Ya” deliver distinct yet complementary critiques of ideological control. Zamyatin warns against blind rationalism and collectivist totalitarianism that reduces human beings to mechanical units, while Suleimenov exposes political censorship and the erasure of cultural diversity in historical scholarship. Both authors defend the right to identity — whether psychological or cultural — and affirm that human development cannot exist without freedom.

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